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DE RUEHLO #0207/01 0231556
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FM AMEMBASSY LONDON
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 1156
INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 LONDON 000207

NOFORN
SIPDIS

UNVIE FOR AMBASSADOR SCHULTE AND ANDREA HALL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/20/2019
TAGS: [IR](#) [IS](#) [KPRP](#) [LE](#) [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [PINS](#) [PREL](#) [UK](#) [IA](#) [SW](#)
SUBJECT: IRAN - ANALYST KHAJEHPOUR ARGUES FOR: BROADENING
ENGAGEMENT ON NUCLEAR ISSUE; NUANCED HUMAN RIGHTS ADVOCACY;
IRAN OUTREACH OPPORTUNITY GENERATED BY GAZA

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Classified By: Political Counselor Rick Mills for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C/NF) Summary: Iran's leadership is committed domestically to low-grade enrichment but is not irretrievably committed to creation of a nuclear weapon, in the view of Tehran-based political risk analyst Bijan Khajepour, who met privately in London with U.S. Ambassador to UNVIE Greg Schulte accompanied by London Iran Watcher (Poloff). Khajepour argued that, given a quiet, calibrated approach to the right Iranian audience, USG engagement on a broad range of strategic concerns, preferably begun after Iran's June elections, could be a way to avert Iran's acquisition of a nuclear weapons capacity. Khajepour argued the USG should strengthen its chances of halting Iran's nuclear programs by appearing in any future negotiations to assign the nuclear issue a lower priority; Khajepour offered some specific formulations which he said he had discussed privately with the Swedish Foreign Minister. Ambassador Schulte underlined that the international community will do nothing to undermine or dilute the authority of UNSC resolutions on Iran, which do and will remain in force.

¶2. (C/NF) Summary continued: In a separate meeting January 20, Khajepour told Poloff USG advocacy with Iranian regime authorities on behalf of detained human rights and civil society figures should include restrained and temperate public statements, carefully tailored to the individual case.

Khajepour also described how the Gaza crisis makes immediate engagement with USG more difficult in the short term for Tehran, but provides a possible way, in his view, for USG to extract a longer-term positive result for U.S.-Iran dynamics from current international tension over Gaza. End summary.

¶3. (C/NF) On his way back to Iran from giving a speech at Ft. McNair's National Defense University (NDU), Tehran-based Atieh Group head Bijan Khajepour, met with Ambassador Schulte and London Iran Watcher (poloff) during a break in the Ambassador's December 12 public diplomacy schedule in London. Bijanpour also met separately with Poloff December 11 and, in a separate trip, January 20.

Since Nuclear Carpet is Priority,
USG Should Appear to Look at Other
Carpets First, or Be Fleeced

¶4. (C/NF) Arguing that regional security and regime legitimacy, not nuclear weapons, are Tehran's priorities, and that the regime's negotiating approach is fixed by national character (vice ideology), Khajepour argued USG will get quicker results at a lower price by focusing its initial Iran

outreach efforts and negotiating tactics away from the USG's own priority: i.e., away from the nuclear issue. Khajepour said the regime's negotiating approach is "in every way (that of) a carpet seller" assessing a potential customer; "the customer must not signal" which carpet he truly wants and "must be willing to walk away, or be cheated." Khajepour argued tactical sequencing of the nuclear issue after less vital issues are addressed could result in the end in a net time savings. He argued a calculating Tehran regime will otherwise hold any issue to which the USG visibly imparts urgency hostage to its own negotiating priorities. Iranian priorities, Khajepour argued, center around the regional security and prestige which, in Iranian eyes, only the United States can bestow.

Khajepour Argues IRGC Backing for
Ahmedinejad Is Limited, and Any Outreach
to Iran Should Therefore Be Delayed

15. (C/NF) Khajepour, using points from his National Defense University presentation, put Iranian policy stances in the context of the regime's informal networks. Such networks bind individuals and groups together through identities forged and shared over decades (e.g., clerical circles from the same seminaries and IRGC circles with shared Iran-Iraq War service), create broad rivalries within the IRIG, and limit the "political space" for innovation or rapid decision.

Rafsanjani when he was president, from 1989-1997, had neglected the post-Iran-Iraq War IRGC, a decision which spawned IRGC resentment, and deep and spreading IRGC penetration of governmental institutions; Khajepour expects the steady replacement in government posts of clerics by IRGC figures to continue.

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16. (C/NF) Khajepour believes Ahmedinejad, because his war combat record is murky, does not enjoy unconditional IRGC support and is therefore not assured of re-election in June 2009, Khamenei's stated support notwithstanding. Khamenei himself, in Khajepour's view, "feels insecure" about his own position within the framework of "velayat e faqih" (clerical rule), due to his own lack of theological achievement or merit-based clerical rank. This underlying insecurity is what underlies what Khajepour said is Khamenei's tendency to shuffle IRGC leadership and organization in times of crisis.

17. (C/NF) Khajepour argued that the shallowness of Ahmedinejad's IRGC support, and the tenuous nature of an insecure Khamenei's endorsement, plus the President's economic policy woes, will likely prevent him from being re-elected in June absent a boost from some dramatic foreign policy development, such as a sudden thaw in relations with the United States. Such a thaw, Khajepour argued, would be credited to Ahmedinejad, and be seen by the regime as vindication of Ahmedinejad's confrontational style, thus scuppering any meaningful opening with the U.S. for years to come.

Negotiations: Find a Workable Functional
Equivalent for "Suspension"

18. (C/NF) Khajepour said general regime distrust of the U.S., cumulative since the 1979 revolution, has created the general conviction in Tehran that the USG's nuclear end game is "zero enrichment" of any type by Iran. Khajepour argued USG needs to be clearer in its messaging; he said "domestic opponents of reconciliation will exploit every opening in your offer ... (the USG in effect) must sell it to the Iranian people." In this regard Khajepour recommended USG use the concrete example of an existing U.S. technology light water reactor, perhaps in Brazil, as a centerpiece of its public approach. Khajepour noted the regime's propaganda

success in marrying the nuclear confrontation to themes of nationalism, and concluded that nuclear enrichment "suspension" is a formula on which no one in Iran's political establishment, including Supreme Leader Khamenei, is able to back down on either now or in the future.

¶9. (C/NF) In the course of a wide-ranging discussion of hypothetical negotiation scenarios, however, Khajepour suggested a change in phrasing, which he said he had recently discussed with the Swedish Foreign Minister, could be key to USG moving toward its goal to halt or slow Iranian enrichment: the substitution in effect of "technical overhaul" for "suspension." Khajepour said he assessed regime leadership would be open to a "technical overhaul" being followed by a period of "enrichment maintenance;" during "enrichment maintenance," nuclear program work would, with verification, not go forward, while further parameters for negotiations, and for further stand-still periods, were established. Khajepour pointed out it would be important for the regime to be able publicly to claim without direct contradiction that it had stood firm on its principle of "no suspension."

"Suspension" Central to UNSCRs'
Content and Authority

¶10. (C/NF) Ambassador Schulte underlined the international community will do nothing to undermine or dilute the authority of UNSC resolutions on Iran, which will remain in force, and pointed to the term "suspension" in those documents. The Ambassador also pointed out that negotiations entail for the United States the inherent risk that they would be a device by which Tehran would be able to buy time to further its nuclear development goals -- "a way to occupy the customer but in the end keep the carpet." The Ambassador noted Tehran's non-transparency with UN nuclear safeguard authorities has been problematic. Khajepour agreed these are powerful objections, but countered a case can be made that Iran's program has been "reactive;" he traced the program's roots to the late shah's efforts and reviewed what he called the many start-ups and stand-downs in every decade since then, ending with Ahmedinejad's foray, beginning in ¶2005. In Khajepour's view the goal of regime planners is not a weapon but some degree of "nuclear ambiguity," on Japan's model; he argued the vagueness of this goal offers opportunities for compromise and meaningful limitation.

Right Approach is Everything;

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Substance Can Be Fashioned to Fit

¶11. (C/NF) Khajepour repeatedly emphasized the content of any offer, on nuclear or other issues, will be less important than the way in which it is offered. With respect to a nuclear offer, Khajepour returned to his carpet seller analogy, and urged the USG sequence and craft its opening so as to reduce in the eyes of the Tehran regime the nuclear issue's apparent importance to the U.S.

¶12. (C/NF) Khajepour underlined the desperation with which Tehran seeks enhanced prestige and role in the region and, deriving from such prestige, greater legitimacy at home. He argued that, although international rhetorical exchanges had resulted in firm regime commitment to nuclear development, and acknowledging the logical inference from nontransparency about regime aims, Khajepour saw no signs the regime specifically wants nuclear weapons capacity. He argued Tehran does want the deterrent value of an apparent or latent capacity, such as a stockpile of enriched fuel would provide. Khajepour claimed the proximity of nuclear-armed Pakistan, a potentially radicalized and hostile Sunni state, looms even larger than the U.S. in Iranian calculations, and draws much expert-level planning attention in Tehran's think-tanks and

ministries.

Khajehpour Sees U.S-Iran Opportunity In
Gaza Crisis: Humanitarian Supply Ship

¶13. (C/NF) Khajehpour, in London on a brief return visit, discussed human rights and Gaza with Poloff on January 20. On Gaza, Khajehpour told Poloff that, in the last two weeks events in Gaza have made near-term engagement with USG more difficult for Tehran. Khajehpour posited a convergence in late 2008 between Iranian and U.S. regional security priorities, with both governments seeing action against Al Qaeda and Sunni extremism as a priority for both. Khajehpour argued that, despite the lack of more than a passing concern by the Iranian public for Palestinians, the credibility of the Tehran regime as a leader among Muslim nations is now fully engaged by the Gaza crisis, a situation pitting Tehran and Washington against each other, rather than sharing an interest "in containing Sunni radicalism," a situation which had obtained as recently as last month.

¶14. (C/NF) Khajehpour said the Tehran regime will remain militant on Gaza until it can show Iranian support for Hamas generating "some tangible benefit" for Palestinians. Khajehpour agreed it is impossible for the USG to generate on short notice any lasting political measure on Israel-Palestine which Iran could support. He argued, however, a gesture by USG such as the release, after any necessary inspection, of the Iranian humanitarian supply ship now held off the Gaza coast, would in Iran's eyes demonstrate "its status as a player," be a public demonstration of USG "respect" for Iran, and enable Tehran to ease its confrontational stance on Gaza.

¶15. (C/NF) Such a measure, Khajehpour maintained, would also create the kind of positive atmosphere needed for any U.S.-Iran outreach on bilateral issues beyond Gaza. Khajehpour added that a fellow Tehran private sector observer, former deputy foreign Minister Abbas Maliki (now of Sharif University and the Caspian Studies Institute) agreed with this view. Khajehpour and Maliki believe Iran would readily agree to inspection of the ship; Khajehpour reasoned the ship is highly unlikely to carry arms, since they could in these circumstances be too easily detected.

Human Rights Advocacy:
USG Needs to Pick Its Moments

¶16. (C/NF) Khajehpour discussed the unnamed senior Iran Ministry of Information official whose January 19 comments on USG civil society's "velvet revolution" efforts at subversion were reported by international media; Khajehpour said the unnamed official heads the ministry's "counter-intelligence" department. Khajehpour viewed the comments as evidence the regime has not yet decided, in the interim surrounding the start of a new USG administration, whether to proceed against activists other than the four named by the official; Khajehpour included Shirin Ebadi as someone whose status is still indeterminate in regime eyes.

¶17. (C/NF) Khajehpour commented on how to maximize

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effectiveness of USG public advocacy on behalf of individual human rights and civil society detainees in Iran. He emphasized individual circumstances, saying "each arrest is different," but argued a common factor is the likelihood in many cases that an arrestee enjoys support "somewhere within the system," meaning that "within a week someone will phone Khamenei's office" on the arrestee's behalf. Khajepour said the pattern of Khamenei and his minions, who sit within a vast, amorphous web of political and financial patronage and overlapping equities, will usually respond favorably to such calls -- unless they have been given prior reason to be

cautious, such as information from security officials that the arrestee in question appears to be working for or is of interest to the Americans, as evidenced by robust, immediate USG statements on the arrestee's behalf.

¶18. (C/NF) Khajepour cited the Haleh Esfandieri case as a textbook example of effective human rights advocacy; he emphasized the "decisive" effect on Khamenei of Lee Hamilton's letter on behalf of Dr. Esfandiari. Khajepour argued the letter demonstrated American interest in an arrest case, provided a message and tone respectful of Khamenei and of Iran, and enabled the regime to act with deliberation, and grant a face-saving release on humanitarian grounds.

But An Occasional Dash of
Ice Water Can Also Be Useful

¶19. (C/NF) Khajepour noted, however, that immediate forceful advocacy is both necessary and effective when the IRIG, as in the Alaei brothers case, makes especially outrageous and implausible accusations, such as the use of "scientists, medical treatment, or sportsmen" for nefarious purposes; he said implausible allegations and hopelessly overheated rhetoric demand the reintroduction, by sources outside Iran, of minimum levels of rationality to human rights dialogue. (Embassy comment: HMG officials reporting from Iran observe regularly that IRIG interlocutors sometimes begin political interactions with incredible, seemingly unhinged allegations or lines of argument. The usual prescription HMG reports, a respectful but pointed and factual rebuttal, redirects discussion to more rational, productive channels, with little lasting damage. End comment)

How Detainees Can Embarrass IRIG
Interrogators: Stay Calm, Open All
Files, Remember Names and Numbers

¶20. (C/NF) Khajepour believes his own past success, in not drawing regime authorities' ire despite his frequent external travel and U.S. connections, stems from his track record of "transparency with the authorities." Khajepour, who has headed his independent risk analysis firm (Atieh Group) in Tehran since the mid-1990's, said he came to regime attention in 1998 and again in 2006, when Ministry of Intelligence (MOIS) officials questioned his business travel to the West. Khajepour said he has always in response offered full access and details of all work and travel to regime questioners who, Khajepour claims, have always declined even to examine any of his activities or files. Khajepour said "fear of embarrassment" is a powerful consideration for most IRIG functionaries, who are themselves operating within a complex, opaque legal and political hierarchy in which many relationships are personal rather than institutional; interrogators try to bully and bluff subjects into agreeing not to travel, as the interrogators do not in most cases have full authority themselves to deny someone the right to travel.

¶21. (C/NF) Khajepour related the extended, harrowing interrogations he endured in 1998, and claimed the key factors in persuading MOIS interrogators to relent were "100 percent transparency" about activities and motivations, calm demeanor in the face of harsh "good cop-bad cop" questioning, and refusal to surrender his passport without a written MOIS receipt. Khajepour also said his own proactive follow-up afterwards about his continuing travel plans, using a telephone number given by an interrogator at a dramatic moment during a "bad-cop" session, appeared to convince MOIS questioners that Khajepour enjoyed the protection of some (unknown) patron within the regime.

¶22. (C./NF) Khajepour said he does not expect to be arrested, but recognizes he could be targeted even now, given the current repressive atmosphere. If arrested, Khajepour

said he would not want USG to intervene immediately on his behalf, preferring low-key USG approaches via his wife (please protect) and his former Atieh Group partner Siamac Niazi (please protect), who Khajepour said has himself moved to from Tehran to Dubai to avoid IRIG arrest.

Comment

¶23. (C/NF) Khajepour has long been a respected USG interlocutor on Iran. Moving frequently between Western and Iranian environments, he has quietly provided USG interlocutors with analysis and insights on regime dynamics which are consistently measured, nuanced, and informed. Khajepour's support for delaying engagement until after Iran's June elections is not shared by all Iranian analysts with whom Poloff meets in HMG and that community.

¶24. (C/NF) Khajepour said he plans travel to the United States, if the U.S. visa for which he recently applied, is issued by February 6, for the Cambridge Energy Conference in Houston February 11. If he is asked, he may be able, as in the past, to include a stop in Washington, D.C. on his way back to Iran. He also said he would, as opportunities arise, reach out to USG officials abroad.

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